AN HISTORICO-JURIDICAL REPORT ON THE SOCIETY OF ST. GERARD MAJELLA

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As a young man, John Sweeney first became involved in evangelization in early 1954 as a member of the Catholic Evidence Guild which was then part of a Praesidium of the Legion of Mary in the Archdiocese of Sydney, New South Wales. As a result of this young man's desire to become actively involved in this apostolic work of the Church, and due to a complex set of circumstances, what eventuated is now an active and responsive Religious Community.

In 1954 John Sweeney was approached by the then Guild Master of a Catholic Evidence Guild (Praesidium), Mr. Peter Gallagher LL.B., K.C.S.S., a prominent retired Sydney Barrister, to assist him in an extension of the apostolate of the Catholic Evidence Guild, namely to provide Religious Instruction to Catholic students in State Government High Schools. Mr. Gallagher himself initiated this work with little or no support from anyone, and went regularly into these schools alone.

Due to John Sweeney's employment situation, it was not possible to take time off from work to carry out this apostolate. However, after much persuasion from Mr. Gallagher, John Sweeney agreed to broach the subject with his employer, seeking time off each week to go into the State High Schools. His employer at this time was Mr. Roy Barnes of Roy Barnes & Co., Cleveland Street, Redfern, N.S.W. and although very reluctant, Mr. Barnes finally agreed to allow John Sweeney to have one day off each week to go and teach in the State Schools.

Mr. Gallagher's idea was to gather together a group of men who would be prepared to make a commitment to this apostolate by taking time off from regular employment as John Sweeney had done. This would be an apostolic group of lay people such as the Saint Vincent de Paul Society or the Legion of Mary.

At the beginning of 1955 John Sweeney began one day a week to give Religious Instruction to Catholic students in State controlled High Schools. Not too far into that first term of school, he became aware of the difficulties that an apostolate of this nature had, and would have, into the future.

During the course of 1955, John Sweeney had the opportunity of meeting the Apostolic delegate to Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop Romolo Carboni. Being a man of vision Archbishop Carboni encouraged John Sweeney to carry on the work that had been begun, and to try to encourage others to join him. It was as a result of this contact with His Excellency that the idea of a Secular Institute was first conceived and discussed. The Apostolic Delegate remained a firm supporter of the vision during the remainder of his time of appointment in Australia, and has up to this present time maintained a warm interest.

In the middle of 1955 a significant event took place. John Sweeney's employer approached him and explained that he would no longer be able to take time off from his employment to continue his work in the State Schools. John Sweeney found himself in a dilemma. He was all too well aware of the need and importance of the work that he had begun with these young people and that it had to continue. But also that he needed employment in order to live.

Seeing very clearly his personal dilemma, John Sweeney approached the Assistant Priest of his own Parish, St. Patrick's Church, Summer Hill N.S.W, Reverend Father C.B. Keogh, D.D., Ph.D. After consultation with Father Keogh, John Sweeney decided to hand in his resignation to Roy Barnes & Company.

During this time, Mr. Gallagher's health deteriorated since he had been suffering from terminal cancer, and the Lord took him to Himself. Considering the events just described, John Sweeney again found himself in a dilemma. The vision of Mr. Gallagher which involved the fulfilling of a very important apostolic role within the Archdiocese of Sydney had begun and could not just disappear for the foundation of the Apostolate had been laid. John Sweeney saw it as a matter of conscience that he do all in his power to see the work continue. It appears that through no choice of his own, but perhaps through the Hand of God, John Sweeney had inherited a legacy to which he would be more deeply committed as time went by.

John Sweeney's Parish Priest at that time, Monsignor Michael Cronin, Parish Priest of Summer Hill N.S.W. had heard about his endeavours, and although rather sceptical about the idea, offered John Sweeney a secretarial position with the Trustees of the Catholic Cemeteries at Rookwood Cemetery, New South Wales.

In **1956** John Sweeney began work at the Rookwood Cemetery Office and was able to take time off to continue his work in the State High Schools.

With a view to following up the Apostolic Delegate's idea, late in **1956** Father Cornelius Keogh arranged for John Sweeney to meet with Reverend Father Thomas Connolly, D.C.L., a Canon Lawyer, and a Professor at St. Patrick's College Manly (later Vicar for Religious in the Archdiocese of Sydney). Dr. Connolly suggested that John Sweeney and Father Keogh write to him outlining the ideas that John Sweeney had expressed and formulate a proposed Constitution for such an organisation.

Father Keogh, Dr. Connolly and John Sweeney worked together on these documents. At the end of **1956** John Sweeney concluded his term of employment at the Rookwood Cemetery office.

In **1957** John Sweeney took a position as a sales representative which gave him a liberal programme and free access to a motor vehicle in order to continue his programme of Religious Instruction to Catholic State High School students.

On the **23rd May 1957** a proposed Constitution, along with a covering letter which is referred to in the preamble of our "Provisional Constitutions", was sent to Dr. Connolly. These documents were presented by him to His Eminence, Norman Thomas Cardinal Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney, who in turn appointed Bishop James Carroll, his Auxiliary Bishop, to oversee the development of this new venture.

Although these significant events had taken place and the year was drawing to a close, John Sweeney had become dissatisfied with his employment as a sales representative due to unreasonable demands that were being placed upon him which made it impossible in the end to continue in that employment. To this date no men had joined him in his work in the State High Schools and this occasioned him to feel somewhat discouraged. In his own words - "...so I placed the matter in the hands of AlmightyGod with the idea in mind that if He wanted the work to continue, He would have to find somebody to continue it.'

In December 1957 John Sweeney applied for a full-time position with Australia Home Furnishers Pty. Ltd., Pitt Street, Sydney, since he had need of employment for financial reasons. Knowing full well that in the forthcoming academic year he would be unable to fulfil his obligation to the State School Apostolate, this further forced him to rely completely on Divine Providence for a solution.

At the end of January 1958, the very week that school was to resume, a gentleman named Bernard David called to see John Sweeney at his home one evening to say that he was very interested in the workthat John was doing and was trying to establish. Bernard David indicated that he would be more than happy to commit himself to this apostolic work and help John Sweeney in any way that he could. (Bernard David and John Sweeney had met each other some years previously and had shared some ideas).

So in the first school term of 1958 Bernard David took over John Sweeney's classes whilst John took up full-time employment with the firm previously mentioned and assisted in the State School Apostolate evenings and at weekends. Bernard David had a private income to assist him, so employment was not a problem for him.

Up until this time there had been no further response from Dr. Connolly or Bishop Carroll. However, towards the middle of 1958, without any prompting from John Sweeney, Dr. Connolly telephoned him at his place of employment informing him that prior to His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy going overseas to the Lourdes Pilgrimage of 1958, His Eminence had spoken with Bishop Carroll about appointing a Chaplain to the Society. The purpose of this appointment was specifically to directly assist in the development and formation of this embryonic organisation.

To say the least,John was taken back by this as the Society as such had not begun and consisted only of Mr. Bernard David and himself.

The Reverend Father John Hatton, who at that time was Administrator of St. Joseph's Parish at Enfield N.S.W., was appointed Chaplain. After being informed of this appointment, John Sweeney and Bernard David promptly went to visit Father Hatton and explained their situation to him. After listening carefully to what they had to say, Father Hatton was undeterred and suggested that they begin meeting with him regularly. Initially these meetings took place at John Sweeney's own home at 37 Dixon Avenue, Dulwich Hill N.S.W.

In 1959 Father John Hatton was transferred to Holy Cross Church, Woollahra N.S.W., where he became Administrator of the Parish for a time. This was also the Parish in which Bishop James Carroll was Parish Priest. So these regular meetings were transferred to the Presbytery of Holy Cross, Woollahra N.S.W. where they continued to meet all during 1959.

During this year, several other men became interested in the work in the State High Schools, this making the total number of the group six. One of these men at this time was teaching on the staff of Narwee Boys State High School. He sought permission from the Headmaster and the Parish Priest, to give Religious Instruction to Catholic boys in the school. During 1959 this teacher and David Bernard continued to do this work.

At the beginning of 1960, Reverend Father Albert Colletto O.F.M. Cap., then Parish Priest of Leichhardt N.S.W., invited the Society to work in the Parish and to establish its first community there. The members of the Society discussed this in consultation with Father Hatton and Dr. Connolly and decided to seek the necessary permission to move into the Parish and set

up the first community.

On the **6th February, 1960,** a letter seeking this permission, accompanied by testimonial letters, was sent to His Lordship Bishop James Carroll, Administrator of the Archdiocese in the absence of His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy, who was overseas. The letter was to approve the following propositions:

a) Provisional Constitutions of the Society as amended;
b) Proposed establishment of the first community house;
c) Appointment of Superiors;
d) Statement of norms of co-operation between the Society and its Chaplain;
e) The immediate apostolic undertakings of the Society;
f) Provisional vows to be taken in private.

After these were sent, a request was made by John Sweeney to approve the Society undertaking the propagation of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which was in its infancy. This was to be done in consultation with the then Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Reverend Father Kevin McGovern.

On **Sunday 3rd March 1960,** Father John Hatton celebrated Solemn High Mass in St. Fiacre's Church Leichhardt N.S.W. This was followed by the official blessing and opening of the first community house at 102 Catherine Street, Leichhardt N.S.W. The community comprised six members.

Within the Parish of Leichhardt, the Brothers were responsible for religious instruction to Catholic students in three State High Schools; responsibility for the children's Masses at both Leichhardt and Lilyfield, N.S.W.; regular visitation to the parents of the State School children and the instruction of Catechists. Much of this State School Apostolate formed the nucleus and testing ground for the future diocesan plan for the training of lay catechists and State School work. Other special duties which the Parish Priest requested were carried out by the brothers.

The brothers also continued their work in other schools for which they had been responsible outside the parish of Leichhardt.

A short time after the establishment of the first community of the Society of St. Gerard Majella, His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy returned from overseas and was informed by Bishop James Carroll that the Society of St. Gerard Majella had begun a community at Leichhardt N.S.W. Cardinal Gilroy's main concern was the religious and spiritual formation of this group of men. Bishop Carroll had approached the Provincial of the de La Salle Brothers, Brother Baptist, who agreed to appoint a brother from their Ashfield N.S.W. community to assist in this formation programme. Br. Urban Joseph was appointed.

During the course of that year, Brother Urban F.S.C., a kind and prudent man, met weekly with this small group of men, and on several occasions arranged for weekends away at the de La Salle Training College at Oakhill N.S.W. for further lectures. With this formative input and the support and guidance of Father John Hatton the Society's Chaplain, came other Priests to assist in the formation programme. The Rector of the Columban Fathers' Seminary, North Turramurra N.S.W., Father C. Baker, S.T.D., L.S.S., came regularly each week and lectured to the community in Sacred Scripture. Father Robert McNeil, a priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney, also came weekly for Benediction, the Sacrament of Penance and spiritual conferences.

In **November 1960** Reverend Father George Meredith, who for many years was the Spiritual Director at the Archdiocesan Minor Seminary was invited to assess the work of the Society and take an interest in the formation of its members. He did this with frequent conferences, personal interviews and a survey of the work and community of the Society. Father Meredith at this time was Parish Priest of North Leichhardt, N.S.W.

At the beginning of **1961** Brother Urban Joseph was transferred to New Zealand and Brother Leo took his place in assisting the Society in the formation of its members.

Prior to Brother Urban Joseph leaving for his new appointment, he had approached the Brothers of St. Gerard about the possibility of some of their men working in the de La Salle Brothers' Schools. At that time it seemed an ideal way of giving financial support to the work of the State Schools. So in **1961** four brothers took up full-time teaching positions in three Catholic High Schools.

At this same period in time the Regional Administration of the Capuchin Fathers changed and a new Provincial had been appointed. The Brothers of St. Gerard were soon informed that the Capuchin Order would be requiring the house at Leichhardt for their own personnel who would be returning from the missions.

This meant the brothers had to find new premises for their community.

The Parish Priest of Leichhardt offered to advance the Brothers money to find a new community residence. However, after discussion amongst the brothers and in consultation with Bishop James Carroll and Father John Hatton, the Society decided it was time to move further afield where there were more urgent needs within the apostolate.

Bishop James Carroll, on behalf of the Society, approached Monsignor M. Walsh, Parish Priest of Bexley N.S.W., and in consultation with Father G. Meredith agreed to give the Society use of a house adjacent with the Parish Church at Bexley N.S.W. So on the **24th December, 1961** the community moved to 18 Salisbury Avenue, Bexley N.S.W. This property required a great deal of renovation to accommodate the brothers. Bishop Carroll came to the Society's aid and provided a considerable sum of money, whilst the manual labour was carried out entirely by the members of the community.

Another significant event occurred, Father John Hatton, the Chaplain to the Society being appointed Parish Priest of Toukley on the North Coast of New South Wales. Although this had immediate implications for the spiritual life of the Society, it was to prove to be of significant importance in the future development of the apostolate of the Society to young people.

In **1962** three brothers were made available on a full-time basis to give Religious Instruction in the State High Schools. The remainder continued full-time work in order to financially support these three brothers who received no financial support for their work within the State Schools.

Also during this same year, the Society became very involved in retreat work and weekend camps for young people. On a trial basis initially, the brothers took groups of boys to Bundeena N.S.W. where the Methodist Church had a holiday camp site. With these initial experiences being so successful, the Society decided to extend this work further. As previously mentioned, Father John Hatton the Society's Chaplain had been appointed Parish Priest of

Toukley on the North Coast of New South Wales. In order to extend this work, Father Hatton arranged for a holiday house to be rented, towards which he contributed half of the weekly rent. The house was used at weekends and during the school holidays to take young people from the State School Apostolate where they would participate in special training programmes.

Although this work was very taxing, the results that were being experienced in the apostolate with these young people and the development of their faith commitment - through regular weekly Religious Instruction, periodic camps and regular home visitation by the brothers to the students' families was well worth the effort. Seeing the results of their efforts,the brothers decided to develop this work one step further by establishing a group for young people which met each week in the Brothers' House at Bexley N.S.W. Here were the beginnings of significant events in the future development of the direction of the apostolate of the Society of St. Gerard Majella.

1962 saw many changes take place internally in the life of the community. The members of the Society had originally opted for a Secular Institute on the advice of the Apostolic Delegate. However at least four of the brothers at the time had previously experienced Religious life and Religious community. This obviously had its effects on the formation of the lifestyle, especially when the spirit of the brothers was still very much in an embryonic form. A new direction was becoming evident, and the only way of finding out what was the most appropriate lifestyle in those early days was to live this developing lifestyle by trial and error, day by day.

In **December 1962** the first annual Private Vows were taken by those who had faithfully fulfilled their trial period.

During the course of **1963** much focus was placed on the community and the formation of the brothers. This was largely due to the further development of attitudes that were previously mentioned concerning the lifestyle. However, because of its newness and inexperience the Society, without the benefit of psychological assessments and other modern instruments were required to stringently vet new comers to the Society who came from many different backgrounds and at times proved unsuitable for religious life. Also there were those who were looking at this new Institute, which was growing quickly and finding its new identity within the Church, who questioned its capacity to form its members and to fully see where its own direction would take it.

With this internal transformation taking place and the associated pressures, Bishop James Carroll suggested that a priest come and live with the community to help with its formation and work through the transformation.

Towards the end of **1963** it became obvious that the premises at Bexley were becoming overcrowded This in itself added to the tensions in the community. In **October** of that same year, the brothers themselves began to build their extensions on to the property.

In **1964** Brother John Sweeney met Reverend Father Gordon Jackson, a Columban priest. In consultation with Bishop James Carroll, Father Jackson was invited to become the Domestic Chaplain mentioned earlier. This arrangement proved to be very successful, his contributions to community life, his lectures to the brothers in Religious Formation, Philosophy and Theology, all were of inestimable value. The community also benefited liturgically due to his priestly ministry. Although a very fruitful and happy relationship developed with Father Jackson, the brothers were the ones that of the very nature of things had to give specific direction to the growth of the Society.

1965 saw the beginnings of direction, stability and acceptance for the Society of St. Gerard Majella. A second community was established at Napier Street, North Strathfield N.S.W. providing extra accommodation for the new members who were to join the Society in the immediate future. During the course of this year the New South Wales Government decided to change its system of education from a five year secondary programme to one of six years. The Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Monsignor C.J. Duffy, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Sydney and Episcopal Chairman of that body, Bishop James Freeman, Auxiliary Bishop to Cardinal Gilroy, saw a practical problem with the changeover to the new educational system which was to take place the following year. Many Catholic school students who wished to repeat the Leaving Certificate would be forced to attend State High Schools to do so. After consultation with Cardinal Gilroy, the Society of St. Gerard was invited to open a repeat Leaving Certificate School for one year in the Parish of St. Benedict at Broadway, Sydney N.S.W.

Although a young and inexperienced community the Society agreed to the Archbishop's request to take on this project. Those brothers who were already teaching in Catholic Schools to support the State School apostolate were withdrawn from their individual schools to assume the responsibility for the new project at St. Benedict's for the school year of 1966. Thus there were significant signs of growth and maturity. St. Benedict's proved to be a great success for the brothers and their students and established the brothers as a credible and accepted apostolic group within the Archdiocese.

In its growth and need for stability in formation, the Society recognised that a permanent Novitiate for the brothers was essential. After discussions with Monsignor C.J. Duffy and Mr. Jeff Davey, the Executive Secretary of the Catholic Building and Finance Commission Brother John Sweeney approached Cardinal Gilroy in November of that year to seek his permission and assistance with finance. His Eminence agreed to this proposal.

During this same interview with Brother John, His Eminence recognising the success of St. Benedict's, asked if the brothers would be prepared to assume the permanent responsibility of a Catholic Regional Boys High School in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. This school at Greystanes N.S.W. was in the care of the Carmelite Fathers who were unable to continue to meet their commitment concerning religious staff. Brother John agreed to put this matter before the brothers for their consideration.

After much soul searching and discussion, fearing that their work in the State Schools could suffer, the brothers reluctantly agreed to accept God's Will as it was to be expressed by their Archbishop. His Eminence informed Brother John that he would willingly accept that responsibility, and that he believed the brothers should take charge of the school, which subsequently they did. Cardinal Gilroy followed this with a letter dated the **26th July 1967** asking that Brother John formally indicate the brothers' willingness to accept full control of the school for the following year.

Cardinal Gilroy also suggested that the property at Greystanes could be developed to incorporate a Novitiate for the Society, but Brother John seeing the need for an independent structure for formation resisted this suggestion. His Eminence accepted this advice and rather than negotiate a loan from a bank, offered the financial resources of the Catholic Church Trust to purchase a property at Kemps Creek N.S.W. This property was blessed and opened by the Cardinal on the **23rd May 1967.**

Events were moving quickly. Cardinal Gilroy directed Archbishop Carroll to move ahead on the matter of the status of this developing Society.

Unexpectedly a letter containing a questionnaire arrived from Archbishop Carroll informing Brother John that he was out of touch with the developments and requesting information to bring him up to date.

Also at the beginning of **1967** another évent took place which was to influence this time of rapid development for the Society. Brother John met Mrs. Madge Cockburn, President of the Youth Welfare Association of Australia. At a subsequent meeting, after expressing her interest in the youth work of the brothers, Mrs. Cockburn offered, on behalf of her Organisation, a large historic house situated at Bowral in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, which could be used as a permanent base for the initial work in youth retreats undertaken by the brothers.

This matter was put to His Emience Cardinal Gilroy on the **10th March 1967** for his approval. This was granted in a letter dated the following day. The deeds to the property were subsequently transferred to the Trustees of the Society of St. Gerard Majella. On the Feast of St. Gerard, **16th October 1971,** Bishop Thomas McCabe, the Bishop of Wollongong, solemnly blessed and opened the centre.

The acquisition of the property at Bowral, the purchase of the Novitiate and the looming responsibility for the Catholic School caused great pressure on the brothers. The physical establishment of the Novitiate and the renovation of the Bowral property with the planning for the school, produced in retrospect, a tremendous advantage since having to struggle within these difficulties to survive welded the members into an even closer family.

And so in **1968** the brothers assumed responsibility for St. Simon Stock High School at Greystanes. The problem of accommodating the brothers on the staff of the school was alleviated by Bishop James Freeman who arranged for the brothers to move into the disused presbytery in Marist Place, Parramatta. This was temporary and not a satisfactory arrangement although it continued for the next three years.

Even though the Novitiate had been established at Kemps Creek N.S.W., Cardinal Gilroy had given a personal undertaking to build a monastery for the brothers at Greystanes. Unfortunately this was not to come to pass in his term as Archbishop of Sydney.

Financially the brothers were able to cope in these times since they were now in receipt of a stipend from the Archdiocese for both the work in the Catholic School and the State Schools. Appreciation of this point will be realized by acknowledging the fact that for the first ten years or so the Society had not been assisted financially in any way from the Archdiocese.

With the many changes and developing works of the apostolate **1969** provided an excellent opportunity and a wealth of experience to draw upon for the brothers to give careful consideration and prayerful thought to the future Canonical Status of their Society. This year was primarily concerned with amending the provisional Constitutions of the Society that had been since its inception. During this year, the brothers spent many weekends together, and in a spirit of prayer and reflection undertook to begin a complete revision of the Constitutions in the light of the documents of Vatican II.

The apostolate continued to grow and expand. The commitment to St. Simon Stock High School and the religious personnel it required demanded that the Society channel into it the men who were academically best qualified to take on full-time teaching. Certainly the commitment to the State Schools never quantitatively diminished. This commitment continued to grow side by side with the Catholic School.

1970 saw another extension to the apostolate. Monsignor G. Lake O.B.E., the Senior Naval Chaplain for the Military Vicariate of Australia, approached the brothers to conduct leadership courses for young Catholic Naval recruits, usually of school leaving age. Added to this, a little later in the year, with the blessing of the Most Reverend J.A. Morgan the Bishop for the Armed Forces of Australia, the brothers were asked to take on Character Guidance Courses for the Royal Australian Army and the Royal Australian Navy combined. Hence the Youth Centre at Bowral was already a full-time concern.

1971 was an eventful year for the Society. On the advice of His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy, and due to a large intake of novices, Bowral was used as the first year novitiate, whilst the second year novices remained at Kemps Creek. Added to this, the Society was to accept juniors who would complete their last two years of school whilst living within the community. This programme was established at Bowral and they attended the Marist Brothers Juniorate at Mittagong for their schooling.

A significant event in the life of the Society during this year was the resignation of Cardinal Gilroy as Archbishop of Sydney and the appointment of Archbishop James Freeman as his successor.

Also during 1971 the Bishop of Bunbury in Western Australia the Most Reverend Myles McKeon, approached the brothers to set up a community in his diocese. Wanting to be sure that the Society of St. Gerard would fit in to the particular circumstances of Bunbury, a team of the brothers travelled to Bunbury to conduct a special programme throughout the diocese and to make an assessment of the needs there.

Returning to New South Wales the team from Bunbury reported that the Society did have an important role to play within the Diocese of Bunbury and that the work required was very much in the spirit of its foundation. In 1973 the first community of six brothers was established in Bunbury.

Meanwhile the situation with regard to the brothers teaching at the Catholic School and living and travelling from Parramatta N.S.W. became increasingly more difficult. Cardinal Gilroy was approached prior to his resignation, but the matter was left for Archbishop Freeman who agreed to look into the questions of both the Canonical Status of the Society and the living arrangements for the school brothers.

Archbishop Freeman referred Br. John Sweeney to Dr. Eugene Hogan, one of the Vicars for Religious who attached great urgency to the canonical matters. And so it was that on the 1st March 1972 the Society of St. Gerard Majella was canonically established in the Archdiocese of Sydney by a Decree of Establishment signed by James Freeman, Archbishop of Sydney. It would be appropriate here to acknowledge that nobody understood the Society's situation and its history better than Archbishop Freeman. He was not only prepared to do those things to which he agreed, but also to honour the promises of his predecessor.

During 1972 after consultation with Archbishop Freeman and the brothers, Brother John Sweeney resumed studies at the Seminary with a view to ordination to the priesthood. Also during this year it would be appropriate to mention that a group of women came together with the intention of establishing a community to complement the work of the brothers. Their first community was opened at Fairfield N.S.W. in 1973 where they were to remain till 1975.

1973 saw a significant development in the life of the Society. After documents had been sent to Rome and a subsequent visit to Sydney from Archbishop Loudesamy, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples had been effected, Cardinal Freeman received from the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples the Faculty to erect the Society of St. Gerard Majella as a Religious Congregation of Diocesan Right. This was done in a document dated **24th March 1973.** Following this on Easter Monday **24th April 1973** in the presence of Dr. Eugene Hogan, the senior brothers pronounced Final Vows in the Chapel of the Monastery of St. John of God at Richmond N.S.W.

This year saw the establishment of a House of the Society of St. Gerard Majella in the Diocese of Bunbury, a significant step forward in the development of the new Institute. Cardinal Freeman warmly supported this move.

On the **8th March 1974** Brother John Sweeney was ordained to the priesthood in St. Mary's Church, Concord N.S.W. This meant one more step along the way towards the realisation of the original aims and objectives as a religious Institute which had been expressed many times in the past in various documents on the nature of the Society. Brother John had previously completed studies which were supplemented by courses completed at the Marist Fathers Seminary at Toongabbie N.S.W.

This year also saw James Cardinal Freeman giving permission for the brothers' monastery at Greystanes N.S.W. to be built and its completion at Christmas of the same year.

During **1975** the Principal of St. Simon Stock High School wrote to Cardinal Freeman seeking permission to change the name of the school from Simon Stock to Newman High School. As the Society had adopted Cardinal Newman's motto of "Heart Speaks to Heart" this was a most appropriate step to be taken for the brothers' only Catholic School.

With the opening of the new house at Greystanes, the Generalate of the Society moved there. The Sisters consolidated themselves by moving from Fairfield N.S.W.to an adjacent property at Kemps Creek giving them the opportunity of a more formal and stable environment in which to develop. The Council of the Society, in consultation with all the brothers, invited one of the brothers who had been studying at the seminary to complete his studies for the priesthood.

1976 provided an opportunity, with no new buildings or major projects taking place, for a period of consolidation. Tertiary studies continued for a number of the community and the workload of the apostolate remained constant.

During **1977** as the awareness of the need for more of the Society's men to be involved in priestly ministry became evident, they welcomed the opportunity for spiritual and liturgical growth with the next ordination to the priesthood of one of the senior brothers, as well as a number of the brothers receiving the Ministry of Acolyte.

Br. John Sweeney, at the request of his Council, wrote to the Apostolic Pro Nuncio requesting clarification to a question concerning the use by the Society of St. Gerard Majella of the Coat of Arms of Cardinal Newman. On the **24th January 1978,** a letter was received from Monsignor de Castro, Charge Affaire of the Apostolic Nunciature, informing the Society that its request for the use of the Coat of Arms of John Henry Cardinal Newman to be used as their own had been forwarded to Rome. A positive reply was received on **17th February 1978** from the Secretariate of State.

In **April 1978** Br. John Sweeney, accompanied by Bishop Myles McKeon, Bishop of Bunbury, left for Rome to investigate the implications of the recent transfer of Australia from the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops. The implications obviously affected the Society of St. Gerard Majella since it had been erected under the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Upon arriving in Rome a special meeting was arranged between Br. John Sweeney, Bishop McKeon and the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious & Secular Institutes, Archbishop Augustine Meyer. The affairs of the Society of St. Gerard Majella were placed in the hands of Father Bernard Ransing, a member of that Sacred Congregation. Through the work of Father Ransing, the process was begun for the change to be effected.

During that same visit Brother John Sweeney took the opportunity of discussing with the officials of the Sacred Congregation for Religious the question of the future development of the Society of St. Gerard Majella with a view to its erection as a Religious Institute of Pontifical Right. The procedure was explained to Brother John, and the question of the final draft of the Constitutions and Book of Customs was discussed.

In a letter dated **5th July 1978, Protocol No. DD 1822-1/78,** permission was granted for the extension of the experimental period to the General Chapter of Election to be held in 1985. This provided the Society of St. Gerard Majella with the opportunity to work on the Constitution and Book of Customs to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion and have them ready to be presented to the Holy See after the General Chapter of Election in 1985.

Reference was made earlier to the Coat of Arms of John Henry Cardinal Newman. The Society of St. Gerard Majella has always had a great affection for Cardinal Newman and a close study of his writings had profoundly affected and formed the spirit of this new society.

During **1978** the Society instigated the setting up of a Newman Resource Centre at the Generalate in Greystanes N.S.W. Further to this being set up, contact was made with the Fathers of the Oratory at Birmingham in England and permission sought to establish The Friends of Newman in Australia. This was done to service the academic needs of Newman scholars and interested people throughout Australia, as well as promoting an interest in Cardinal Newman and praying for the cause of his beatification.

In **August of 1979** the Society of St. Gerard was responsible, along with the newly formed Friends of Newman, for presenting The Newman Centenary Celebrations in Sydney. A Symposium was held at St. John's College within the University of Sydney, and a special Centenary Mass in St. Mary's Cathedral celebrated by His Eminence James Cardinal Freeman, Archbishop of Sydney. At this Symposium Newman scholars from overseas as well as from various States of Australia presented papers which were later edited and published in book form by the Society of St. Gerard.

On the **15th September 1979,** the First General Chapter of Election after the canonical erection of the Society of St. Gerard Majella was held at the Generalate at Greystanes N.S.W. Br. John Sweeney was elected Superior General for a further term of six years. Sir James Cardinal Freeman, Archbishop of Sydney, presided over the election of the Superior General. This was a significant ecclesial and historical event, and most important in the life of the Society of St.Gerard Majella since it would prove to be the only occasion in the foreseeable future when all of the members of the Society could be gathered together from various parts of Australia for an extended period of time to be with one another to consider the fundamental matters pertaining to the life

and spirit of their Society. Post Chapter Committees were established to continue the work of the General Chapter.

1980 saw the work of Post Chapter Committees carry out with great enthusiasm. The responsibility of these Committees was to look closely at all areas of the lifestyle and apostolic activity of the Society, with a view to presenting submissions to the following General Chapter of 1985.

In **June of 1980,** Sir James Cardinal Freeman wrote to Brother John Sweeney giving permission for one of the senior brothers to return to the seminary and complete his studies for the Diaconate.

1981 saw a further step forward in the achievement of goals for the Society when on the **20th August** this brother was ordained to the Diaconate. This ministry is one which the Society would wish to promote in line with the present directives of the Holy See in re-establishing the role of Deacon in the Church.

During the course of the year, and in preparation for the forthcoming General Chapter of 1985, the Society believed it necessary to evaluate the work and future Commitment in the Diocese of Bunbury in Western Australia. To this end one of the General Councillors was appointed to this task which he carried out through the remainder of the year.

In **September of 1981** Br. John Sweeney and his Vicar General travelled to Rome where they met up with Dr. John Thornhill S.M. the Society's Theological Advisor, and made further contact with the Sacred Congregation for Religious concerning the Constitutions and the Society's eligibility for Pontificate status. Since Fr. Bernard Ransing had retired this initiated the first meeting with Fr. F.X. Gokey who replaced him, and Fr. Gokey introduced them to Fathers Ravasi, Elio Gambari and Basil Heiser Under-secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. The results of this meeting were to give clear guidelines on what was expected in preparing a submission. There was an indication that the Sacred Congregation for Religious would look favourably on an application from the Society after the next General Chapter of Election to take place in August of 1985. Fr. F.X. Gokey also arranged to have Fr. Van de Broeck advise Br. John Sweeney on the Constitutions.

On the **22nd May 1982** another brother was ordained to the priesthood in Sydney N.S.W. with another beginning his studies at the Seminary. During the final months of this year Cardinal Freeman resigned the See of Sydney. Prior to the Cardinal's resignation the Parish Priest of Greystanes N.S.W., Reverend Father Brian Galwey approached Br. John Sweeney to discuss his pending resignation as Parish Priest and the future of the parish. He suggested that the Society should consider accepting the pastoral responsibility of the parish. This in fact was a matter that the Society had already considered because of the degree of involvement it had in the parish for some years.

On **27th October** Father Galwey and Brother John Sweeney went to visit Cardinal Freeman and presented him with a proposal that upon the resignation of the Parish Priest of Greystanes, the Society would be prepared to accept such a responsibility. This was received positively by His Eminence and an assurance given that the matter would be discussed at the next Archdiocesan Council meeting.

Early in **1983** the matter of the Parish of Greystanes N.S.W. was pursued with the new Archbishop of Sydney, Archbishop Edward Clancy. This was referred by Archbishop Clancy to the Regional Bishop, Bishop Bede Heather.

Bishop Heather conducted a consultation in the Outer Western Region of Sydney firstly with the Clergy of the Region and then with the people of the Parish of Greystanes. This consultation proved to be a very satisfactory one and the conclusions were that the Society of St. Gerard Majella should take the pastoral care of the Parish of Greystanes. This matter was further referred to the Senate of Priests for the Archdiocese of Sydney by Archbishop Clancy, and similarly the same approval was given.

However, the matter of the Brothers' Constitutions and apostolate came up for discussion and it was thought that clarification would be needed in order that it could be clearly understood that the spirit of the Institute and the Constitutions in no way significantly were in conflict with this proposal.

At the beginning of 1984 Br. John Sweeney telexed Br. Fabian Hines O.H. at the Vatican pharmacy and asked Br. Fabian to act on his behalf and approach Fr. Basil Heiser of the Sacred Congregation for Religious to give an opinion on the proposal that the brothers should take responsibility for the pastoral care of the parish of Greystanes N.S.W. Br. Fabian consulted Fr. Heiser and replied by telex in the affirmative.

A request was later made by the Archdiocesan Authorities for a letter detailing the reply from Rome. Br. John Sweeney wrote on the **12th March 1984** to His Excellency the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious & Secular Institutes. A subsequent reply dated **22nd May 1984 Protocol No. 1322/84** signed by Father Basil Heiser, Under Secretary was received.

Father Heiser outlined the appropriate manner in which this pastoral care should be undertaken and that an appropriate contract be drawn up between the Archbishop of Sydney and the Society of St. Gerard Majella. That contract was duly drawn up and on the **21st September 1984** was submitted to the Superior General. The contract was finally signed by the Superior General of the Society of St. Gerard Majella and the Archbishop of Sydney. On the **1st January 1985** the Society of St. Gerard Majella was to receive responsibility for the pastoral care of the Parish of Greystanes N.S.W.

1984 saw a separation of the activities of the Youth Centre and Retreat Centre at Bowral placed under the care of a senior brother with vast experience in this field. His appointment was a separate appointment to that of the Superior of the community who previously had been responsible for the entire apostolic activity at Bowral.

In **March** of this year, Br. John Sweeney wrote to Br. Quentin Duffy, Vicar General of the Marist Brothers at their Generalate in Rome asking if he would be prepared to act on the Society's behalf with the Sacred Congregation for Religious in matters concerning the drafting of the new Constitutions. Br. Quentin agreed to do this, and in **October 1984** Brother John Sweeney and his secretary Brother Andrew Robinson travelled to Rome and held profitable meetings with Brother Quentin and the Sacred Congregation.

In **April of 1984** the Society gave a priest to the Archdiocese of Sydney as Assistant to the Parish Priest of Greystanes as part of a long range preparation programme being considered by the Archbishop of Sydney for the Society of St. Gerard Majella assuming the pastoral care of the Parish of Greystanes in the future . As well, the Society appointed a brother and sister as full-time social workers to the Parish of Greystanes to exercise another aspect of the Society's apostolate in the Region.

August 1984 was the month in which a week long General Assembly was held in preparation for the General Chapter of Election due in 1985. This

offered all of the members of the Society the opportunity to present their ideas and future vision.

On **17th March 1985** the Society of St. Gerard Majella celebrated its 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the first community at Leichhardt N.S.W. At a Solemn Pontifical Mass celebrated in the Parish Church of Greystanes, His Grace Archbishop Edward Clancy paid tribute to the work of the brothers and joined by six other Bishops and eightyfive priests, concelebrated Mass with Sir James Cardinal Freeman presiding. An overflow congregation of 1200 people joined the Brothers of St. Gerard in celebrating this significant event in the life of the Society. The Mass was followed by a Testimonial Dinner at which His Eminence Sir James Cardinal Freeman was the Occasional Speaker. He had been associated with the Society of St. Gerard since its inception and was the Archbishop of Sydney at the time of its canonical erection as a Religious Institute of Diocesan Right.

The State School apostolate continued to expand with the addition of many after-school activities such as Faith Support Groups, Visitation of families, Youth Masses and Barbeques.

Within the Parish of Greystanes the Saturday night the 6.30 p.m. Vigil Mass is set aside each week for a special Liturgy for young people.

On the **11th August 1985** the Second General Chapter of Election was held at Greystanes N.S.W. Reverend Dr. Roger Austin, Vicar for Religious in the Archdiocese of Sydney presided over the election of the Superior General and remained present throughout the Chapter, together with Reverend Dr. John Thornhill S.M. as advisors to the Chapter. Brother John Sweeney was elected Superior General for a second term. The new Constitutions were accepted and sent to the Archbishop of Sydney for approval. This was effected by a Decree dated **9th March 1986** and signed and sealed by the Archbishop of Sydney.

CHRONOLOGY

1957	23rd May Proposed Constitution and covering letter sent to Dr. Connolly
	Cardinal Gilroy appointed Bishop James Carroll to oversee the development of the Society
1959	Reverend Father John Hatton appointed as Chaplain to the Society.
1959	6th February, letter sent to Bishop Carroll along with testimonial letters seeking approval for the Provisional Constitutions of the Society as amended; establishment of the first community; appointment of Superiors; statement of norms of co-operation with the Society's Chaplain; the apostolic undertakings of the Society; and provisional vows to be taken in private.
1960	Official blessing and opening of the first community house at Leichhardt N.S.W.
	Brother Urban Jospeh F.S.C. appointed to assist with religious and spiritual formation of the community.
	November, Reverend Father George Meredith invited to assess the work of the Society and take an interest in the formation of its members.
1961	Br. Leo F.S.C. appointed to take Br Urban's place.
	24th December the community moved to 18 Salisbury Ave Bexley New South Wales.
1962	First annual private vows taken.
1964	Reverend Father Gordon Jackson appointed Domestic Chaplain to the Society.
1965	Second community house established in Napier Street, North Strathfield, New South Wales.
1966	Repeat Leaving Certificate School run by the Society at St. Benedicts Broadway, New South Wales.
1967	23rd May, official blessing and opening of the Society's Novitiate House at Kemp's Creek N.S.W., by His Eminence, Norman Thomas Cardinal Gilroy.
	26th July, letter from Cardinal Gilroy asking for a formal indication of the Society accepting responsibilty for the Catholic School at Pendle Hill New South Wales.

1967 Historic House at Bowral New South Wales, donated to the Society for use as a youth retreat centre.

1968 The Brothers assumed full responsibility for St. Simon Stock Boys' School at Pendle Hill New South Wales.

1971 First year Novitiate moved to Bowral N.S.W., whilst the second year Novitiate remained at Kemps Creek.

The Society began to accept juniors who completed their schooling whilst living in the community at Bowral.

A team of Brothers travelled to Bunbury, Western Australia, to assess the needs of the diocese with a view to establishing a community.

16th October, house at Bowral blessed and opened by Bishop Thomas McCabe, Bishop of Wollongong.

1972 Society Canonically established within the Archdiocese of Sydney by a Decree of Establishment signed by James Freeman, Archbishop of Sydney, and dated 1st March 1972.

Brother John Sweeney returned to the Seminary to complete his studies for the priesthood.

1973 Community of six brothers establish a house in the Diocese of Bunbury, Western Australia.

24th March, the Society was erected as a Religous Congregation of Diocesan Right.

23rd April, the senior brothers pronounced their final vows.

1974 8th March, Brother John Sweeney was ordained to the priesthood.

A new monastery was completed at Pendle Hill, N.S.W. and the mother house moved from Kemps Creek to Pendle Hill.

1975 Cardinal Freeman gave permission for the Name of the school to be changed to Newman High School.

1977

Brother Stephen ordained to the priesthood.

Several brothers received the ministry of Acolyte.

1978

Permission received through Monsignor de Castro, Charge d' Affaire of the Apostolic Nunciature, for the Society to use the Coat of Arms of Cardinal Newman as its own.

Brother John Sweeney, accompanied by Bishop Myles McKeon, Bishop of Bunbury, travelled to Rome to investigate the recent transfer of Australia from the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops.

5th July, Protocol No DD1822-1/78, permission was granted for the extension of the experimental period of the Constitutions to the General Chapter of Election to be held in 1985.

The Newman Resource Centre was established at the brothers monastery at Greystanes.

1979

August 1979, under the direction of the Society of St. Gerard, the Cardinal Newman Centenary Symposium was organised and held in Sydney.

15th September, the first General Chapter of Election was held at Greystanes N.S.W. Brother John Sweeney was elected Superior General for a further six year term.

1981

20th August, Brother Joseph Pritchard was ordained to the diaconate.

September, Brother John Sweeney and his Vicar General travelled to Rome concerning the Constitutions and the Society's eligibility for Pontifical Status.

REDACTED

1984

General Assembly of the brothers was held to prepare for the General Chapter to be held in 1985.

1985

1st January, the pastoral care of the parish of Greystanes N.S.W. was given to the Society of St. Gerard Majella.

17th March, the Society celebrated its 25th anniversary of the the establishment of its first community at Leichhardt N.S.W.

11th August, the second General Chapter of Election held at Greystanes. Brother John Sweeney was elected for another term of six years.